

# PREAMBLE

## THE IDEA OF POWER

*Michel Henri Kowalewicz*

Jagiellonian University in Krakow  
michel.kowalewicz@uj.edu.pl

Orbis Idearum (ISSN: 2353–3900), Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2015), pp. 9–32

The Sciences, are small Power; because not eminent; and therefore, not acknowledged in any man; nor are at all, but in a few; and in them, but of a few things. For Science is of that nature, as none can understand it to be, but such as in a good measure have attained it.

Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury\*

Scientia, Potentia est; sed parva; quia Scientia egregia rara est, nec proinde apparet nisi paucissimis, & in paucis rebus. Scientiae enim ea natura est ut esse intelligi non possit, nisi ab illis qui sunt Scientia praediti.

Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury\*\*

Under this simple *Idea* of Power. I have taken occasion to explain our *Ideas* of *Will*, *Volition*, *Liberty*, and *Necessity*; which having a greater mixture in them, than belongs barely to simple Modes, might perhaps, be better placed amongst the more complex.

John Locke\*\*\*

Tout pouvoir est une magie réelle, si l'on appelle magie la possibilité de produire des effets sans contact ni agent, en provoquant pour ainsi dire une parfaite et immédiate docilité des choses. [...] La magie, c'est l'idée qu'on peut commander aux choses comme aux êtres.

Roger Cailliois\*\*\*\*

Probably the majority of our “modern” children intuitively associate the Power icon ( $\Psi$ ) with the possibility of either activation or deactivation of all kinds of devices: starting with a television or a light switch and ending with more complicated and perhaps more fascinating items, such as smart phones, tablets, computers or game consoles.

Even a very young child is able to understand the two conditions, identified by words like “on” and “off,” or by symbols such as “1” and “0.” These settings are defined by the International Electrotechnical Commission (known in French as *La Commission électrotechnique internationale*) and also include the widely used symbols: IEC 5007 (line: I), IEC 5008 (heavy circle:  $\bigcirc$ ), IEC 5009 (line within a

broken circle: ☐), and IEC 5010 (line within a circle: Ⓢ). The IEC 5007 symbol means “on,” while IEC 5008 is associated with “off,” both symbols being taken from the binary system. The symbol IEC 5009 (also associated with the black waning crescent moon: ☾), commonly referred to as sleep mode, is a low power state, and the IEC 5010 symbolizes the radical control switch between the “on” and “off” states. The graphical symbols adopted by the International Electrotechnical Commission that represent these power states – “on,” “off,” and “sleep” – do not need complex descriptions or detailed manuals to distinguish “power up” (that means “turn on” or “wake up”) from “power down” (that means “turn off” or “go to sleep”). We can imagine how this idea of equipment functioning captures contemporary children’s perception of the world.

From this perspective a basic understanding of the concept of power comes down to the ability to turn on or off a device. Sneaky parents can restrict access to their children’s computer through parental controls software or by simply blocking physical access to the device. The simplest solution in this case is to hide the power supply. So, the power supply and power button are the basic instruments to control the world of “modern” devices.

As children quickly learn to control other children and to place their fate in the exercise of power, they also acquire knowledge on different contexts and uses of the word. With age they begin to understand the broader idea of power, that is, the idea of power as extended beyond the simple control of things and people to the abstract understanding of political control, ability or opportunity, and authority or influence. At school, the child also discovers the mysterious secrets of power from the standpoint of mathematics, electricity or of micro- or telescopic observations. The word “power,” use in singular or plural, accompanies us all in our everyday lives, defining our place in the world and determining our relationships not so much by pure force, but by setting the reach, and thereby the limits, of our possibilities. From Antiquity to Modern Times, the historical dynamics of our changing understanding of the idea of power recalls a child’s discovering of the world, as both are based on new dealings and correlations.

The word “power,” which already in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century was drawn directly from the Latin *posse* (e.g. in French), expressed the modality of the possible,<sup>1</sup> reflects, in first place, the notion of probability. In the French language one can notice the dynamics of the words *pouvoir*, *savoir* and *vouloir* that fulfill dual roles depending on the context: both as verbs and as nouns.<sup>2</sup> In English the noun appears in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, adopted from the Anglo-French, but the verb is a more recent innovation and going back to the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and means “to make powerful,” to supply a machine, or to move quickly.<sup>3</sup> But the roots of

1 See: *Le Grand Robert de la Langue Française*, ed. by A. Rey, Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert 2001, vol. 5, p. 1068.

2 See: *ibid.*

3 See: *Online Etymology Dictionary*: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=power> [15.09.15].

the idea of “power” go also back to the Indo-European (*potis*) and Greek (*potis* [πόσις], *despotes* [δεσπότης], and *potnia* [πότνια]) traditions, which Barbara Cassin sketches in her *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2004 for French, and 2014 for English edition).<sup>4</sup> It was in the times of Quintilian that the Latin adjectives such as *possibilis* and *impossibilis* first appeared. These adjectives were derived from the verb *potest*, reflecting the Greek opposition: *dunatos* [δυνατός] and *adunatos* [ἀδύνατος], and developed in turn from *dunamis* [δύναμις] meaning strength.<sup>5</sup> The history of the idea of power is accompanied, therefore, by an understanding of the notion as a logical category of modality, and as an ontological category (*potentia*) that determines the real and the actual. Beside that, the idea of power is most commonly associated with the ability to act in a moral or political sense of *potestas* and has subsequently gained in importance particularly in Modern Times.<sup>6</sup>

In 1957 Robert A. Dahl attempted to deal not so much with the history of the notion of power, but with the very concept that “is as ancient and ubiquitous as any that social theory can boast.”<sup>7</sup> He added simultaneously: “If these assertions needed any documentation, one could set up an endless parade of great names from Plato and Aristotle through Machiavelli and Hobbes to Pareto and Weber to demonstrate that a large number of seminal social theorists have devoted a good deal of attention to power and the phenomena associated with it.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1597 Francis Bacon announced to all and sundry that *Ipsa scientia potestas est!*<sup>9</sup> Thomas Hobbes considered *scientia* in 1651 to be a “small Power” and in 1668 he considered it to be a *potentia*. However, as recently was proved by Joseph Canning in his stage on *Ideas of Power in the Late Middle Ages, 1296–1417*,<sup>10</sup> al-

4 See: *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. by B. Cassin, translated by S. Rendall / Ch. Hubert / J. Mehlman / N. Stein / M. Syrotinski, translation edited by E. Apter / J. Lezra / M. Wood, Translation / Transnation, Princeton / Oxford: Princeton University Press 2014, [e-book edition:] pp. 4568–4570; cf. also *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, ed. by B. Cassin, Paris: Editions du Seuil / Dictionnaires Le Robert 2004, p. 979.

5 See: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, [e-book edition] p. 4568.

6 See: *ibid.*, pp. 4569f.

7 See: R. A. Dahl: The Concept of Power. In: *The Behavioural Science* 2–3 (July 1957), p. 201.

8 See: *ibid.*

9 See: F. Bacon: *Meditationes Sacrae. De Heraesibus*: 1597, p. 241: “Dei quam potestatis; vel putiusejus partis potestatis Dei, (nam et ipsa scientia potestas est) qua scit, quam ejus qua raovet et agit; ut praesciat quaedam otoise, quae non praedestinet et praordinet.” See: B. Vickers: Francis Bacon and the Progress of Knowledge. In: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 53–3 (1992), p. 512: “It should be noted that the ascription to Bacon’s philosophical works of the generalized statement that ‘knowledge is power’ is erroneous. [...] The phrase does occur, as quoted, once in Bacon, but in the essay on ‘Heresies’ in the early *Meditationes Sacrae* (published with the 1597 *Essays*), where Becan distinguished three kinds of heresies, the third being ‘those who . . . give a wider range to the knowledge of Godthan to his power (for knowledge itself is power) whereby he knows, than to that whereby he works and acts.’ (tr. Spedding; VII, 252). [...] The rather specific context again makes it impossible to extract the expression ‘knowledge is power’ as some Baconian axiom.”

10 See: J. Canning: *Ideas of Power in the Late Middle Ages, 1296–1417*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014.

ready in the late Middle Ages, Dante Alighieri, Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, Bartolus, Baldus, and John Wyclif, drawing extensively on the tradition of Aristotle and Augustine, were laying the foundations of the modern understanding of the notion of power. It is here that we also find emerging political discourse around the different facets of the concept. But Dahl observes in his approach to the concept that:

Doubtless it would be easy to show, too, how the word and its synonyms are everywhere embedded in the language of civilized peoples, often in subtly different ways: power, influence, control, pouvoir, puissance, Macht, Herrschaft, Gewalt, imperium, potestas, auctoritas, potentia, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Referring specifically to the concept of power in English, Dahl is necessarily led to conclude that:

Unfortunately, in the English language power is an awkward word, for unlike 'influence' and 'control' it has no convenient verb form, nor can the subject and object of the relation be supplied with noun forms without resort to barbaric neologisms.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of power that will be analyzed by Dahl, however, is understood as a relationship among people within some specific properties of this relationship.<sup>13</sup> According to Dahl, the key issue concerning power, however, is the possibility of measuring power, i.e. the comparability of power.<sup>14</sup> Only in this way is it possible to estimate its (relative) strength and impact.<sup>15</sup> But in the conventional moral or political understanding of power it is not to be confused with force.<sup>16</sup>

Thereto Thomas Hobbes and John Locke give us excellent examples. On one hand, in his *Leviathan*, Hobbes demonstrated that power or *potentia* are not only virtual or potential. That which provides us with power can only be defined by power itself, which is to say that we must exercise power in order to see its fruits.<sup>17</sup> Hobbes distinguishes—both in his first English edition from 1651, and in his

---

<sup>11</sup> See: R. A. Dahl: *The Concept of Power*, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> See: *ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>13</sup> See: *ibid.*, pp. 202–205.

<sup>14</sup> See: *ibid.*, pp. 205–209.

<sup>15</sup> See: *ibid.*, pp. 209–214.

<sup>16</sup> See: *ibid.*, p. 201: “power is here defined in terms of a relation between people, and is expressed in simple symbolic notation. From this definition is developed a statement of power comparability, or the relative degree of power held by two or more persons. With these concepts it is possible for example, to rank members of the United States Senate according to the ‘power’ over legislation on foreign policy and on tax and fiscal policy.”

<sup>17</sup> See: D. van Mill: *Liberty, Rationality, and Agency in Hobbes's Leviathan*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2001, p. 215f.

Latin version from 1668—natural and instrumental powers.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Locke studied power from a totally different angle; in exposing the uselessness of the concept of innate ideas, he explained how the idea of power arises in the human mind. As Michael Jacovides explored “The Origin of the Idea of Power,” Locke thus tried to retrace not so much a history of an idea as, starting with the classic Locke’s *Essay On Human Understanding* and especially the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter *Of Power*, he attempted to familiarize us with a process in which “we build the idea of power out gathered by witnessing agents causing changes.”<sup>19</sup> Locke makes this process particularly intelligible thanks to a clear form of discourse and an exemplary argument divided into the following sections: “This Idea how got,” “Power, active and passive,” “Power includes Relation,” “The clearest Idea of active Power had from Spirit,” “Will and Understanding two Powers in Mind or Spirit,” etc.<sup>20</sup> Locke puts particular emphasis on liberty (“Liberty, what,” “Liberty belongs not the Will,” and “Liberty is freedom to execute what is willed”). Here Locke clearly demarcated concepts such as liberty and freedom, will and desire, to allow for the main arguments found in such titles as “Government of our Passions the right Improvement of Liberty” and “Active and passive power, in motions and in thinking.”<sup>21</sup>

18 See: Th. Hobbes of Malmesbury: Of Power. In: *Leviathan* (English edition of 1651), p. 67: “The Power of a Man, (to take it Universally,) is his present means, to obtain some future apparent Good. And is either *Originall*, or *Instrumentall*. *Naturall Power*, is the eminence of the Faculties of Body, or Mind: as extraordinary Strength, Forme, Prudence, Arts, Eloquence, Liberality, Nobility. *Instrumentall* are those Powers, which acquired by these, or by fortune, are means and Instruments to acquire more: as Riches, Reputation, Friends, and the secret working of God, which men call Good Luck. For the nature of Power, is in this point, like to Fame, increasing as it proceeds; or like the motion of heavy bodies, which the further they go, make still the more hast;” see: *id.*: De Potentia. In: *Leviathan* (Latin edition of 1668), p. 43: “Potentia cujusque (universaliter sumpta) est Mediorum omnium, quae habet ad Bonum aliquod futurum apparens adipiscendum, aggregatum. Est autem vel *Naturalis*, vel *Instrumentalis*. *Potentia Naturalis*, est Excellentia Facultatum Corporis, vel Animi: ut Robur, Forma, Prudentia, Ars, Eloquentia, Liberalitas, Nobilitas. *Instrumentales* sunt quae per *Naturales* vel fortunam acquisitae, Media & Instrumenta sunt ad Potentiam augendam: ut Divitiae, Existimatio, Amici, & Operatio impercepta Dei, quam homines plerumque appellant Fortunam. Potentiae enim natura hac in re Famae similis est, eundo crescens; vel corporum gravium descensui quae procedendo acceleratur.”

19 See: M. Jacovides: Locke’s Construction of the Idea of Power. In: *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science* 34, p. 329. Beside Locke, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Edoardo Boncinelli also takes the topics from the perspective of neuroscience, trying to show how ideas spring out, cf. E. Boncinelli, *Come nascono le idee*, Roma / Bari: Editori Laterza 2008, blurb: „Il momento della produzione dell’idea è brevissimo: un fiat, un soffio. Tra le possibili metafore la più calzante e quella di una associazione anomala, non scontata, ardita. Ma anche le idee balorde nascono così, alcune però si rivelano geniali. E qui entrano in gioco la perseveranza, la coerenza e la logica...”

20 See: J. Locke: *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding. In Four Books*, London: Printed by Eliz. Holt, for Thomas Basset, at the George in Fleet Street, near St. Dunstan’s Church <sup>2</sup>1690, chapter XXI; cf. also online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10615/pg10615-images.html> [15.09.15].

21 See: *ibid.*

The notion of power attracts the attention of both Hobbes and Locke for various reasons, leading to differing individual interpretations. Nevertheless, in the shadow of these interpretations is religion. And as Bacon—referring to the divine sovereignty—uses the term *potestas*, so Hobbes—referring to the man—customs the term *potentia*. In contrast, the “power” of Locke is closely linked with the concept of freedom and volition. In the background of these different interpretations was the doctrinal change in the Anglican Church in 17<sup>th</sup> century and the acceptance of the Catholic understanding of “free will.” William Uzgalis draws our attention to this theological change in his comment on Locke’s chapter “Of Power.” From this scope we can better understand the “determinism” of Hobbes, and the ambivalent approach of Locke to the dogma of *liberum arbitrium*. However, the abandonment of the Protestantism negation of free will that had been typical for Lutherans or Calvinists (within the doctrine of predestination), opened new possibilities for interpreting both freedom and will.<sup>22</sup> But as Uzgalis notes:

Liberty comes from the power either to carry out a volition or not to do so. Locke, though not saying so explicitly, is attacking the doctrine of freedom of the will where the paramount question is about the freedom of volition. Locke thinks that this emphasis on volition is a mistake, for simply having volition is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of liberty. Having the volition and having the power to carry it out (or not) are jointly sufficient for liberty.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore reference to the Catholic understanding of free will seems to be crucial for understanding the modern vicissitudes of the notion of power. It is not so much language, and still less ethnicity or nationality, but religion that will be decisive for the development of the concept from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Looking at how the British concept evolved, we can see the conceptual transition from the reference to God in the sense of *potestas* in the direction to man in the sense of *potentia*, or “small power” as it is called by Hobbes, or power, *tout court*, by Locke. Combining or demarcation power with force (as *potentia* or *potestas*) in the early

---

22 See: W. Uzgalis: *Locke’s Essay concerning Human Understanding. A Reader’s Guide*, London: Continuum 2007, p. 55: “It is worth nothing that the debate about free will and determinism occurred during this period both in the theological and the scientific domains. Free will was a Catholic doctrine. Luther and Calvin, the Protestant reformers, rejected free will in favor of divine determinism and predestination. If one considers omnipotence to be one of God’s properties, it is easy to see how complete determinism of the created world might follow from this. Thomas Hobbes was both a theological and a scientific determinist. The Anglican Church, which was supposed to be a Protestant church, abandoned Lutheran and Calvinist determinism in favor of free will a decade or so before the publication (without the author’s permission) of Hobbes’s exchange with Bishop Bramhall in 1654. One of the points that Hobbes makes in defense of his position is that the leaders of the Protestants, Luther and Calvin, were determinists. Bramhall’s rejection of this claim is quite implausible. Hobbes is also remarkable in drawing the determinist implications from the work of Galileo.”

23 See: *ibid.*, p. 57.

Modern Times has nothing to do with the particular English, French or German attitudes of philosophers, but with religious and as well doctrinal (Protestant or Catholic) understandings of the world and of the place of a man therein. Therefore, Bacon's domestication (from Latin roots) of the very notion of *scientia* as ordered knowledge, and this without any religious or confessional connotation,<sup>24</sup> was perhaps more meritorious than the announcement *Ipsa scientia potestas est!*

The foundations of the modern concept of power, established by Hobbes and Locke, created fertile ground for the further growth of the idea in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Uzgalis highlights the importance of Locke's contribution in two principal ways: first for physics and secondly for ethical and political issues:

Chapter XXI 'Power,' the longest chapter in the Essay, is important for several reasons. First, it takes us from the inherent properties of physical objects and space and time to a discussion of causality, or how physical objects affect one another. Analogously, it takes us in respect of minds from the reception and construction of ideas to volition and action. It is in this context that we get Locke's discussion of free will and determinism and our evaluation of acts as good and evil.<sup>25</sup>

David van Mill emphasizes the significance of Hobbes's contribution as follows:

There is a tendency to think of Hobbes's notion of power simply in political terms. Michael [sic] Foucault, for example, suggests that Hobbes's notion of power is insufficient because it is a top-down concept in which the sovereign imposes his will from his position of political authority. Instead, Foucault suggests that power is a more fluid, pervasive phenomenon that rises from the bottom as well as falls from the top. [...] In fact, Hobbes has a much more sophisticated concept of power than Foucault suggests, and when he talks of power he rarely discusses it in strictly political terms; instead he notes its pervasive qualities in civil society, and in the state of nature. If power resides in the latter condition then it clearly cannot only refer to the exercise of political

24 See: Ph. Büttgen / R. Imbach / U. J. Schneider / J. Selderhuis: Einleitung, Doctrina als Norm und als Form. Entwurf einer Fragestellung / Introduction. La doctrine comme forme et comme norme. Esquisse de questionnaire. In: *Vera Doctrina. Zur Begriffsgeschichte der Lehre von Augustinus bis Descartes / L'idée de doctrine d'Augustin à Descartes*, ed. by Ph. Büttgen / R. Imbach / U. J. Schneider / J. Selderhuis, Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 123, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag 2009, p. 10: "L'histoire de la doctrine embrasse ainsi la formation des savoirs et celle des identités religieuses à la fin du Moyen Age et à l'époque moderne. Dans l'invocation, permanente en ce temps-là, de la 'vraie, saine et droite doctrine', elle rassemble, entre autres, l'histoire des clergés, de l'université, de la catéchèse, l'histoire de la censure et du contrôle des idées, l'histoire de la formation des sectes, tendances et écoles philosophiques, théologiques, scientifiques, l'histoire des intellectuels et des savants. Ce sont là quelques-uns des lieux de doctrine qui seront explorés. Forme et norme, les deux aspects se retrouvent dans nos deux titres: *Vera doctrina* et *Sacra doctrina*." See especially Th. Gontier: *Doctrine et science dans les Essais de Montaigne*. In: *ibid.*, pp. 343–364.

25 See: *ibid.*, p. 55.



authority. If we carefully examine what Hobbes says about power we find that he focuses on the individual and on complex social relations not on the sovereign. The overriding, albeit instrumental drive for Hobbes, is the desire for power, broadly defined as a person's 'present means, to obtain some future apparent Good.' This definition is broken down into instrumental and natural power, the latter being the 'eminence of the Faculties of Body, or Mind,' and the former the instruments that our natural capacities have helped us acquire and that in turn help us to gain even more power; that is, more means of attaining future goods.<sup>26</sup>

The assumptions of social order set out in the political philosophy of Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu, presented in *The Spirit of the Laws* in 1748,<sup>27</sup> and in the epoch-making Europeanization of Russia as outlined by John Brown in 1764 for Catherine the Great, played a key role in the modern meaning of a democratic state and the separation of powers.<sup>28</sup> The understanding of power in the eighteenth century was influenced not only by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1762) *Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*,<sup>29</sup> but also—and perhaps more so—by two key issues of the century launched by the Free Society for Economy and Agriculture in Petersburg in 1766, and as within the class for philosophy of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin in 1781. The first competition was devoted to the question of "serfdom" and "peasant property"; the second competition, in turn, introduced the question proposed by Frederick the Great: Does the sovereign have the right to deceive the people? (*Est-ce que le souverain a le droit de tromper le peuple?*)<sup>30</sup> As an answer to the first question, François Marie Arouet de Voltaire proposed two dissertations: one in Latin and the other in French.<sup>31</sup> The Latin essay was written anonymously under the motto: *Si populus*

26 See: D. van Mill: *Liberty, Rationality, and Agency in Hobbes's Leviathan*, pp. 213f.

27 See: Ch. de Montesquieu: *De l'esprit des loix ou du rapport que les loix doivent avoir avec la constitution de chaque gouvernement, les mœurs, le climat, la religion, le commerce, &c. à quoi l'auteur a ajouté. Des recherches nouvelles sur les loix romaines touchant les successions, sur les loix françoises, & sur les loix féodales*, Genève: chez Barillot et fils 1748.

28 See: M. Kowalewicz: Eine 'gute Aufzucht' als Aufgabe der Aufklärung oder als Staatsangelegenheit? Zur Rezeption einiger französischer und britischer Ansätze der Pädagogik in Deutschland und Russland im 18. Jahrhundert. In: *Interdisziplinarität und Internationalität. Wege und Formen der Rezeption der französischen und britischen Aufklärung in Deutschland und Rußland im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by H. Duchhardt / C. Scharf, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern 2004, p. 254.

29 See: J.-J. Rousseau: *Du contrat social ou, Principes du droit politique*, Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey 1762.

30 See: W. Kraus: Eine politische Preisfrage im Jahre 1780. In: *id.: Das wissenschaftliche Werk*, ed. on behalf of the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften by M. Neumann, vol. III: *Aufklärung III: Deutschland und Spanien*, ed. by M. Fontius, Berlin / New York: Walter de Gruyter 1996, pp. 192–202.

31 Vladimir Somov communicated in 2007 these unpublished essays in the framework of the project



*dives*, *Rex dives* (if the people are rich, the king is rich), and was subsequently placed by Voltaire in summary form in his *Philosophical Dictionary* (*Dictionnaire philosophique portatif*)<sup>32</sup> and in *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*<sup>33</sup> in the article devoted to property.<sup>34</sup> The question posed by the Berlin Academy can be traced back to the initiative of Jean le Rond d'Alembert, which he proposed to the king in a letter on December, 18<sup>th</sup> 1769.<sup>35</sup>

The significant queries raised in Russia in the 1730s (initially only around the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Petersburg)<sup>36</sup> and again in the 1760s, during the reign of Catherine the Great (through the Europe-wide proposals of education and legislative reforms for Russia and also the above mentioned question of the possible abolition of serfdom in Europe's "laboratory of Enlightenment") were particularly momentous for all of the civilized world and in many ways outshined the overrated debate about the core of *Aufklärung* in Germany that evolved two decades later in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in 1783 (containing pieces by such great minds as Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottfried Herder, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing or Moses Mendelssohn).<sup>37</sup> It was also in Russia in the 1760s that Leonhard Euler pointed out the concepts of freedom and power as part of his project *Letters*

---

*Les Archives de l'Est et la France des Lumières* by Georges Dulac [et al.], cf. Voltaire: *Discours sur le sujet proposé par la Société économique. Devise: Si populus dives, Rex dives*. [Dissertation en latin, devise:] *A tellure omnia*, ed. by V. Somov, in: *Les Archives de l'Est et la France des Lumières. Guide des archives et inédits*, vol. II: *Inédits*, Ferney-Voltaire: Centre International d'Etude du XVIIIe Siècle 2007, pp. 518–531 [in French and in Latin].

32 See: F. M. Arouet de Voltaire: *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif*, Londres [Genève: Cramer] 1764.

33 See: *id.*: *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*, par des amateurs. Nouvelle édition complète [sic] en six volumes, Genève: [Bardin] 1775.

34 See: V. Somov: Voltaire et le concours de la Société libre d'économie de Pétersbourg. In: *Les Archives de l'Est et la France des Lumières*, p. 495.

35 See: *Cœuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, vol. XXIV, Berlin: Imprimerie Royale (R. Decker) 1854, p. 467: "La question: s'il se peut faire que le peuple se passât de fables dans un système religieux, mériterait bien, Sire, d'être proposée par une académie telle que la vôtre. Je pense, pour moi, qu'il faut toujours enseigner la vérité aux homes, et qu'il n'y a jamais d'avantage réel à les tromper. L'Académie de Berlin, en proposant cette question pour le sujet du prix de métaphysique, se ferait, je crois, beaucoup d'honneur, et se distinguerait des autres compagnies littéraires, qui n'ont encore que trop de préjugés."

36 See: M. Kowalewicz: Die Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Petersburg oder die trianguläre kulturelle Begegnung. In: *Kulturtransfer Polen-Deutschland. Wechselbeziehungen in Sprache, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, vol. 2, ed. by K. Sauerland, Bonn: Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen 2001, p. 73: "Die akademische Gemeinschaft lebte keineswegs in einer perfekten Harmonie. Seit ihren Anfängen wurde die Sozietät durch die Streitigkeiten Basler Gelehrter um die Prinzipien der Aufklärung geteilt: auf der einen Seite standen Hermann und Bülfinger, auf der anderen Daniel und Niklas Bernoulli. So wurde die Akademie zwischen 1729 und 1730 in zwei antagonistische Lager gespalten: in die Anhänger von Leibniz und in die von Newton. Der Konflikt umfaßte beinahe die ganze akademische Gemeinschaft, ohne Rücksicht auf die Nationalität. [...] Nach außen konnte jedoch die deutschsprachige Gelehrten-gemeinde immer eine exemplarische Einigkeit bewahren."

37 See: Kant / Erhard / Hamann / Herder / Lessing / Mendelssohn / Riem / Schiller / Wieland: *Was ist Aufklärung? Thesen und Definitionen*, Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam 1976.

to a German Princess, *On Different Subjects in Physics and Philosophy* (*Lettres à une princesse d'Allemagne sur divers sujets de physique et de philosophie*).<sup>38</sup> Euler contested the French materialism that was dramatically rampant thanks to Julien Offray de La Mettrie at the Academy in Berlin, and because of Denis Diderot and Melchior Grimm who were in Russia, a country that was particularly exposed to the threat of massive intellectual contamination.<sup>39</sup> Euler takes part in the debate with materialism on behalf on the extremely influential German-speaking academic scene in Russia, which was deeply rooted in Protestantism.<sup>40</sup> His cosmology presented in *Letters to the German Princess*, was written in French, the language of Euler's philosophical adversaries and the language of physics at that time. The reflection on power contained in this cosmology was tremendously important as it introduced an important element into the debate on *potentia* and *potestas* which had until then been clearly delimited in French as "potentiality" and "force." Therefore in the 18<sup>th</sup> century not only was physics shaped on the basis of the French language but so too were fundamental philosophical concepts. As *Letters to the German Princess* reveal, this shift influenced on the one hand the main issues of the century in physics such as gravity, inertia, force or electricity, and on the other, liberty, freedom, revelation, creation, and power.<sup>41</sup> In the letter on *Influence of the Liberty of Spirits upon Events* (Letter LXXXVII) Euler stated:

But, if we allow to the souls of men and of animals the power of producing motion in their bodies, which their organization alone would not have produced, the system of the universe is not a mere machine, and events do not necessarily take place as in the preceding case.<sup>42</sup>

38 See: L. Euler: *Lettres à une princesse d'Allemagne sur divers sujets de physique et de philosophie*, 2 vol., Saint Petersburg: Imprimerie de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences 1768–1772.

39 See: M. Kowalewicz: Quelques aspects des réseaux de langue allemande autour de l'Académie des sciences de Pétersbourg. In: *La Culture française et les archives russes: une image de l'Europe au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, études réunies par G. Dulac avec le concours de D. Tourisson et celui de M. Piha et M. Reverseau, Ferney-Voltaire: Centre international d'Etude du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle 2004, pp. 211–237.

40 See: an abridged version of lectures given on Twelfth International Enlightenment Congress: Knowledge, Techniques and Cultures in the 18th Century in Montpellier in July 2007 ("Lettres à une Princesse d'Allemagne et la contribution de Leonhard Euler dans le domaine de la philosophie," Ordinary Session, 8: "Philosophy in Europe"), in the framework of the Kolloquium für Wissenschaftstheorie und -geschichte am Institut für Philosophie I der Ruhr-Universität Bochum in November 2010, and at the symposium at the University of Picardy in Amiens on "Prohibitions" in March 2012: M. H. Kowalewicz: La cosmologie de Leonhard Euler et l'exclusion de la réflexion religieuse du discours philosophique en France du XVIII<sup>e</sup>. In: *Les Interdits*, ed. by D. Buschinger, Amiens: Presses du 'Centre d'Etudes Médiévales' Université de Picardie – Jules Verne 2012, pp. 126–133.

41 See: *ibid.*

42 See: L. Euler: *Letters of Euler On Different Subjects in Physics and Philosophy. Addressed to a German Princess*, trans. by H. Hunter in two volumes, London: Printed for Murray and Highley [et al.] 1802, ol. II, p. 334; see the original French version in: *id.*: *Lettres à une Princesse d'Allemagne: Sur divers sujets de physique & philosophie*, ed. by Srishti D. Chatterji, Lausanne: Presses Polytechniques

With an emphasis on liberty, Euler draws a sharp line between an ordinary machine and a thinking being. He reconciles the assumptions of free will (volition) with both sin and predestination:

Another objection, however, is started against liberty, founded on the divine prescience. God, it is said, foresaw, from all eternity, every resolution which I should form, and every action which I should do, during every instant of my life. [...] Thus the prescience of God by no means encroaches on my liberty, and all my actions remain equally at liberty, whether God foresaw them or not.<sup>43</sup>

There were, however, less physical issues that divided the French materialists and German-speaking Protestant scholars. These physical or philosophical arguments were not difficult to accept by the French community of scholars and thinkers in Paris or in Berlin, but in approaching a possible philosophical consensus, religion increasingly became a bone of contention. These different attitudes were also reflected in the context of purely physical (not only philosophical) issues. For example, this is attested to by the two projects of the Supplement to 18<sup>th</sup> century Encyclopedias: the project of Denis Diderot and D'Alembert (known as *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* or also called the *Encyclopedia of Paris* and the *Encyclopedia of Bouillon*)<sup>44</sup> and the project of Fortunato Bartolommeo de Felice (known as the *Encyclopedia of Yverdon*).<sup>45</sup> The first of these endeavors reflected materialistic tendencies, while the other was strongly rooted in religion. Thus, these two significant and competing encyclopedic projects differed firstly in reference to religion, and secondly in confessional tradition. While the first started the project in the newly unified Catholic France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, the second focused on the interpretation of religious doctrine in Protestant Switzerland. It was thus not the language that differed

---

et universitaires Romandes 2003, p. 164: "Mais dès qu'on accorde aux âmes des hommes et des animaux quelque pouvoir sur leurs corps; pour y produire les mouvements, que la seule organisation des corps n'aurait pas produit, le système du monde n'est plus une pure machine, et tous les événements n'y arrivent pas nécessairement, comme dans le cas précédent."

43 See: *id.*: *Letters*, vol. II, p. 330f. See also the French version in: *id.*: *Lettres à une Princesse d'Allemagne*, pp. 162f.: "On forme cependant encore la liberté une autre objection tirée de la *Préscience* de Dieu. On dit que Dieu a prévu de toute éternité toutes les résolutions ou actions que je ferai pendant tous les instants de ma vie. [...] Ainsi la *Préscience* de Dieu n'ôte rien à ma liberté; et toutes mes actions demeurent également libres, soit que Dieu les ait prévues, ou non."

44 See: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, par une Société de gens de lettres; mis en ordre & publié par M. Diderot; & quant à la partie mathématique, par M. D'Alembert, 36 vol., Paris, [then] Neuchâtel, [then] Paris, [then] Amsterdam: chez Briasson, ... David l'aîné, ... Le Breton, ... Durand 1751–1780.

45 See: *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire universel raisonné des connoissances humaines*, mis en ordre par M. De Felice, 58 vol., Yverdon: [F.-B. de Félice] 1770–1780.

in these two projects, because both were edited in French, but rather the “doctrine,” that is, the understanding of knowledge in general in classic Latin before the Reformation and the “teaching of the church” after the Reformation.<sup>46</sup> After the publication of Euler’s *Letters*, the editors of both encyclopedic enterprises, Jean-Baptiste René Robinet in Bouillon and De Felice in Yverdon, approached the Imperial Academy of Sciences with a request to provide articles to these projects. The historical record suggests that Leonhard Euler and Johann Albrecht Euler, son of the great Euler and perpetual secretary of the Academy, acceded to the request of De Felice and wrote an extensive article that was crucial from the standpoint of physics (especially related to the notion of “force”).<sup>47</sup> But it is also the very concept of “power” that has been included in a number of ways, as evidenced by the two perspectives of the Encyclopedia editors.<sup>48</sup>

Within the Encyclopedia of D’Alembert and Diderot<sup>49</sup> we find a general article on the concept of power as conceived within natural law and politics, but also articles by Louis de Jaucourt on “paternal power” and “power understood as military art,”<sup>50</sup> as well as an article by Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d’Argis on “power in jurisprudence.”<sup>51</sup> The article on force was developed in terms of Voltaire’s aesthetics<sup>52</sup>

46 See above note 24.

47 See article “force,” provided to the Supplement of the Encyclopedia of De Felice: [L. Euler / J. A. Euler]: Force. In: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire universel raisonné des connoissances humaines, Supplément*, Yverdon: [F.-B. de Felice], vol. 3, pp. 555–558; see also *id.*: Forces perturbatrices. In: *ibid.*, pp. 558f. See also the site dedicated to this enterprise of De Felice: <http://www.hls-dhss.ch/textes/f/F44577.php> [15.12.15], which disclosed the authors of this contribution: “D’autres n’ont écrit qu’un seul article, comme Leonhard et Johann Albrecht Euler (article ‘Force’).”

48 See above notes 38 and 39.

49 See: [unknown]: Pouvoir. In: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 5, p. 255: “s. m. (Droit nat. & politiq.) Le consentement des hommes réunis en société, est le fondement du pouvoir. Celui qui ne s’est établi que par la force, ne peut subsister que par la force; jamais elle ne peut conférer de titre, & les peuples conservent toujours le droit de réclamer contre elle. En établissant les sociétés, les hommes n’ont renoncé à une portion de l’indépendance dans laquelle la nature les a fait naître, que pour s’assurer les avantages qui résultent de leur soumission à une autorité légitime & raisonnable; ils n’ont jamais prétendu se livrer sans réserve à des maîtres arbitraires, ni donner les mains à la tyrannie & à l’oppression, ni conférer à d’autres le droit de les rendre malheureux. Le but de tout gouvernement, est le bien de la société gouvernée. Pour prévenir l’anarchie, pour faire exécuter les lois, pour protéger les peuples, pour soutenir les foibles contre les entreprises des plus forts, il a fallu que chaque société établît des souverains qui fussent revêtus d’un pouvoir suffisant pour remplir tous ces sujets. L’impossibilité de prévoir toutes les circonstances où la société se trouveroit, a déterminé les peuples à donner plus ou moins d’étendue au pouvoir qu’ils accordoient à ceux qu’ils chargeoient du soin de les gouverner.

50 See: L. de Jaucourt: Pouvoir paternel. In: *ibid.*, pp. 256f. See also the entry on military power: *id.*: Pouvoir. [...] (*Art militaire*). In: *ibid.*, p. 256.

51 See: A.-G. Boucher d’Argis: Pouvoir. [...] (*Jurisprud.*). In: *ibid.*, p. 256.

52 See: Voltaire: Force. In: *ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 109: “s. f. (*Gramm. & Littér.*) ce mot a été transporté du simple au figuré. Force se dit de toutes les parties du corps qui sont en mouvement, en action; la force du cœur, que quelques - uns ont fait de quatre cents livres, & d’autres de trois onces; la force des vis-

and in terms of force in mechanics, force of inertia, and energy (what Leibniz called *force vive*) by d'Alembert himself.<sup>53</sup>

In the Encyclopedia of De Felice the concept of power was placed at the root of natural law ("We mean by that word a moral superiority of one person over another or several others, granted by law; & we give the name *puissance* to name a physical superiority that is in force"<sup>54</sup>) and further developed within political law, where the emphasis was placed on legislative and executive power.<sup>55</sup>

In the late 18th century, Immanuel Kant added to the debate on "force" the so-called *Urteilkraft* and *bildende Kraft*, which thanks to Herder and Hegel developed metaphysical meanings.<sup>56</sup> The clear distinction in English and in French between "force" and "power" led to confusion regarding the third critique of Immanuel Kant, the *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, habitually translated into English as the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* or *Critique of Judgement, tout court*. Just as in Spanish, the French translation limited *Kritik der Urteilkraft* to the faculty of judgment, and the Kantian text is known in the French-speaking world as *Critique de la faculté de jugement*. For German Idealism and the Humboldt University's project, a key role would also be played by the Kantian notion of *Einbildungskraft*, a loan translation from Latin *vis imaginatio*, translated into English as "fancy," "imagination," or "imaginativeness," and into French as *faculté d'imaginer, fantasie, imagination (créatrice)*, or *inventivité*. Although the concept of "force" was often used in the 18th century in the context of art and aesthetics, from the mid-19th century onwards the demarcation between "force" and "power" became less and less prominent under the influence of German language in physics and philosophy in general. This issue is explored within the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*.<sup>57</sup>

For that reason, finding the German-language equivalent of "power" can cause greater difficulties than could have been expected at first glance. The *Dictionary*

ceres, des poumons, de la voix; à *force de bras*."

53 See: d'Alembert: Force en Mécanique. In: *ibid.*, p. 110; see: *id.*: Force d'inertie. In: *ibid.*, p. 112; see: *id.*: Force vive, ou Force des Corps. In: *ibid.*

54 See: F. B. De Felice: Pouvoir. In: *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire universel raisonné des connoissances humaines*, Yverdon: [F.-B. de Félice] 1774, vol. 34, p. 818: "(N), s.m., Droit Nat. Nous entendons par ce mot une supériorité morale d'une personne sur une autre ou sur plusieurs autres, accordées par les lois; & nous donnons le nom le nom de puissance à une supériorité physique qui consiste dans la force."

55 The entire article devoted to power was written by De Felice, including sections on marital and paternal authority, see: *ibid.*, pp. 818–839.

56 See: F. Kaulbach: Der Begriff der Kraft in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie: bewegende und bildende Kraft. In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. by J. Ritter / K. Gründer / G. Gabriel, Basel: Schwabe Verlag 1976, vol. 4, p. 1180: "Die Philosophie versuchte in Zusammenarbeit mit der neuzeitlichen Naturwissenschaft und ihrer Rede von der K. die Begriffe der Physik und die ihnen entsprechenden Erscheinungen durch Zurückführung auf ihren 'Grund', auf das 'Wesen' der Sache selbst zu rechtfertigen. Der in diese Bewegung hineingezogene physikalische Begriff der K. gewann metaphysische Bedeutung."

57 See: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 2287ff.; *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, p. 457ff.

of *Philosophical Terms* by Elmar Waibl and Philip Herdina does not appear to be much help here, where power—depending on the context—can mean *Kraft* (in the sense of potency, faculty, ability, and capacity), but also *Macht*, *Herrschaft* or *Gewalt* (in the sense of might, domination, influence), *Vermögen* (as ability, capacity), and finally *Mächtigkeit* (e.g. in mathematics).<sup>58</sup> This translational polysemy is confirmed—among others—by the entries in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* concerning *Kraft*,<sup>59</sup> *Macht*,<sup>60</sup> and *Gewalt*.<sup>61</sup> Certainly, the common denominator linking power to *Kraft* in the sense of *potentia*, or *vis* is the Greek notion of *dunamis* [δύναμις] that means strength.

Unlike the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* provides the etymological roots of the force (*Kraft*) concept exclusively in Greek *dunamis* [δύναμις] and not in the *energeia* [ἐνέργεια] or *entelecheia* [ἐντελέχεια].<sup>62</sup> Therefore, in modern German philosophy we have to deal in turn with the so-called *bewegende* and *bildende Kraft* mentioned above.<sup>63</sup> The interpretation of the concept of *Kraft* begins to get complicated, which, in the light of modern philosophy (since Leibniz, who wrote in French of *force primitive*, or starting by Wolff, who writes about *Kraft*, as *Quelle der Veränderungen*) increasingly refers to concept of change (*Wirkung*). Therefore the concept of “force” as *Kraft* signifies more than does “power.” However, the two continued to generally be understood as synonymous, particularly on the grounds of 18<sup>th</sup> century physics within the French language in which the two concepts were increasingly less clearly delimited, something that is seen within the substantial encyclopedic enterprises of Diderot and D’Alembert, and De Felice.

The authors of the entries within both the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* and the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* point out a dynamic history of the concept of “force.” Whereas Friedrich Kaulbach underlines the role of German Idealism,<sup>64</sup> Françoise Balibar even tried to understand this dynamic development by developing a richer historical perspective:

58 See: *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms / Wörterbuch philosophischer Fachbegriffe*, ed. By E. Waibl / Ph. Herdina, Wien: Facultas Verlags- und Buchhandels AG 2011, p. 928.

59 See: M. Jammer: *Kraft*. In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 4, pp. 1177–1180; see also F. Kaulbach: II. Der Begriff der Kraft in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie: bewegende und bildende Kraft. In: *ibid.*, pp. 1180–1184.

60 See: K. Röttgers: *Macht*. In: *ibid.*, vol. 5 (1980), pp. 585–604; K. Lichtblau: II. M.-Theorien vom deutschen Idealismus bis zur Gegenwart. In: *ibid.*, pp. 604–617; W. Goerd: III. Byzanz und Osteuropa. In: *ibid.*, pp. 617–622; H. Rodingen: IV. [...] marxistisch-leninistische [...] [Auffassung]. In: *ibid.*, pp. 622–625; W. E. Mühlmann: V. Der M. – Begriff der östlichen Religionen und des Polytheismus. In: *ibid.*, pp. 625–629; A. Seigfried: VI. Judentum und Neues Testament. In: *ibid.*, pp. 629–631; R. Hauser: VII. [...] Theologie. In: *ibid.*, p. 631.

61 See: K. Röttgers: *Gewalt*. In: *ibid.*, vol. 3 (1974), pp. 562–570.

62 See: *ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 1177; *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 2287; *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, p. 457.

63 See: F. Kaulbach: II. Der Begriff der Kraft in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie.

64 From the German idealism through the Modern Times to us arose around the concept of *Kraft* dif-

The word ‘energy’ followed an evolution that was the reverse of the evolution of ‘force.’ It is derived from the Greek *energeia* [ἐνέργεια]; we know that Aristotle, in his study of movement, contrasts energy with potentiality and that this duality deeply marked the development of European philosophy and science until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the word ‘energy’ came to be used only in literature, ‘force’ having supplanted it in discussions of the natural world.<sup>65</sup>

While Barbara Cassin in his *Dictionary of Untranslatables* under the entry “force” devotes attention to the general relationship between such concepts as *dunamis* [δύναμις], *energeia* [ἐνέργεια], and *entelekheia* [ἐντελέχεια],<sup>66</sup> Françoise Balibar, author of the main article, is trying to find, in more depth than is noticeable in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, an explanation for the dramatically increasing polysemy of the concept of power in French (and also in English) as *Kraft* under the influence of physics, a field that had been growing since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. She noted at once that the clear demarcation between “force” as *energy* and “power” as *potentiality* emerging with Aristotle, was maintained in English and in French as well as in other Roman languages only until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the influence of the German language, the intricacies of terminology grew:

In every European language, the word ‘force’ (English) / force (French) / Kraft (German) underwent an abrupt transformation with the publication in 1847 of the dissertation ‘Über die Erhaltung der Kraft’ [On the conservation of force] by Hermann von Helmholtz. More precisely, whereas in its vernacular usage, the word remained synonymous with power in the vague sense of the term (as in the expressions ‘having the force of law,’ ‘la forza del destino’), its conceptual usage, which until then had been just as vague, was suddenly, ‘by the force of mathematics,’ radicalized. After 1847 the word may have two translations: ‘force’/force/Kraft (directed action producing or tending to produce movement, in conformity with the laws of Newtonian dynamics), and ‘energy’/énergie/Energie (scalar, that is, nondirected, magnitude obeying a metaphysical principle of conservation, just like ‘matter’). The different manners of referring in German to the conservation of energy (‘die Erhaltung der Kraft’ / ‘die Konstanz

---

ferent kinds of theories that introduce new interpretations of the notion. The propositions of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel, Adam Müller von Nitterdorf, Franz von Baader, Heinrich Gotthardt von Treitschke and Johann Gustav Bernhard Droysen illustrate the dynamics of this process, see: F. Kaulbach: II. Der Begriff der Kraft in der neuzeitlichen Philosophie.

65 See: Force. In: *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, p. 457; see also in the English version *id.*: Force. In: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 2288.

66 See: B. Cassin: “Dunamis”, “energeia”, “entelekheia” et la définition aristotélicienne du mouvement. In: *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, pp. 458f.; see also in the English version *id.*: Dunamis, energeia, entelecheia, and the Aristotelian definition of motion. In: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, pp. 2289–2297.



der Energie' / 'Energiesatz') are traces left by the difficult development of this notion.<sup>67</sup>

We can observe the gradual spread of the use of the concept of *Kraft* on the basis of German language (not only in relation to Kant, but also to the growing importance of German physics). This conceptualization contributed to a polysemy in those languages that use terminology derived directly from Latin, founded on the notions of power and *pouvoir*. Balibar examines in detail the vicissitudes that contribute to the changing understanding of power in French even in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as seen in the *Letters to the German Princess* by Leonhard Euler. Here Balibar is quite right, but the emphasis on language alone does not fully explain the changes taking place in relation to such concepts as "power" and "force" in French, the language of scientific communication in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in physics. Balibar concludes: "Thus, the ambiguities of the word *Kraft* are not, and never will be, rigorously the same as those pertaining to the French and English word 'force'."<sup>68</sup> It is also true that "The meaning of the word in vernacular speech then expands, and it acquires a vague technical sense—even, in the last thirty years, a technocratic one."<sup>69</sup> In spite of this, it is not so much the nationality of Euler or the special manner of thinking in terms of the German language that will be decisive in this case, but rather, Protestantism will determine the positions of Euler that encourage the subsequent multi-dimensionality of the concept of power on the grounds the German language.<sup>70</sup> The astonishment of Balibar is similar to the initial reactions of the academic community in Paris after the publication of Euler's *Letters* including the ambiguous approach to this text especially by Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, marquis de Condorcet, who arbitrarily censored

67 See: F. Balibar: Force. In: *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, p. 457; see also in the English version *id.*: Force. In: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, pp. 2287–2288.

68 See: *ibid.*, p. 2301; see: *id.*: Force. In: *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, p. 458.

69 See: *ibid.*: "La signification du mot dans la langue vernaculaire s'élargit alors et il acquiert un sens technique, voire, ces trente dernières années, technocratique."

70 One can ask if the following mocking drift was really required in this place if that truly brings a lot about: "Il est amusant de constater que dans ce register de langue qui prétend à l'exactitude scientifique, le sens du mot est complètement dénaturé – comme dans l'expression économies d'énergie, qui constitue, à proprement parler, un contresens puisqu'une quantité qui, par définition, 'se conserve' ne saurait être 'économisée'. Ce manquement aux règles élémentaires de la logique a le mérite de révéler une difficulté théorique: l'idée de conservation est une idée tout aussi, sinon plus, savante que celle d'énergie ou de force et, en tant que telle, elle est inévitablement malmenée par la langue courante." See: *ibid.*, p. 458; see also the English version: *id.*: Force. In: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, pp. 2298f.: "It is amusing to note that in this register of language that claims scientific exactitude, the sense of the word is completely denatured—as in the expression 'energy economizing', which, strictly speaking, is a contradiction, since a quantity that by definition is 'conserved' cannot be 'economized'. This failure to abide by the basic rules of logic has the virtue of revealing a theoretical difficulty: the idea of conservation is one that is just as erudite as, if not more than, that of energy, and as such, it is inevitably misused by common language."

the passages of *Letters* that he considered to be non-philosophical, that is, pertaining to religion. It is worth noting that such misunderstandings arose in large part on the basis of differing religious conceptualizations of the world.

This also largely confirms the analysis of Byung-Chul Han, presented in his theoretical essay devoted to the concept of *Macht*,<sup>71</sup> one of the German-language equivalent of “power,” provided by the *Dictionary of Philosophical Terms* by Waibl and Herdina.<sup>72</sup> In the preamble to his recent approach Han sketches the misunderstandings related to the notion of *Macht*:

As regards the concept of power (*Macht*) there is still a theoretical chaos. The obviousness of the phenomenon is offset by a total lack of clarity of the concept. For some it means oppression. For others, it is a constructive element of communication. The legal, political and sociological ideas of power (*Macht*) stand in contrast with each other, and are not reconciled with each other. The idea of power (*Macht*) is easily connected with freedom or with constraints and force. For some, power (*Macht*) is based on joint action. For others it is understood to in relationship to struggle. Some draw a sharp distinction between power and violence. For others, violence is nothing more than an intensified form of power (*Macht*). Power is often associated with the law, but often with arbitrariness.<sup>73</sup>

In his article within the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* on the two key concepts of German philosophy, *Macht* and *Gewalt*, Marc de Launay approved of Han’s analysis.<sup>74</sup> De Launay outlines the evolutionary history of the Latin terms *potestas* and *potentia* towards *Macht* and *Gewalt* and suggests solutions to challenges within religious discussions around these notions:

When Luther comments on Romans 13 (‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities’), he writes that ‘one must not resist authority (*Obrigkeit*) by force (*Gewalt*), but only by confessing the truth’ [...]. This interpretation underlines one of the connotations—rebellious force—that gradually, and es-

71 See: B.-Ch. Han, *Was ist Macht?*, Stuttgart. Philipp Reclam 2005.

72 See above note 51.

73 [Transl. by M. H. Kowalewicz], see: B.-Ch. Han, *Was ist Macht?*, p. 7: “Hinsichtlich des Machtbegriffs herrscht immer noch ein theoretisches Chaos. Der Selbstverständlichkeit des Phänomens steht eine totale Unklarheit des Begriffs gegenüber. Für den einen bedeutet sie Unterdrückung. Für den anderen ist sie ein konstruktives Element der Kommunikation. Die juristische, die politische und die soziologische Vorstellung von der Macht stehen einander und unversöhnt gegenüber. Die Macht wird bald mit der Freiheit, bald mit dem Zwang in Verbindung gebracht. Für die einen beruht die Macht auf dem gemeinsamen Handeln. Für die anderen steht sie mit dem Kampf in Beziehung. Die einen grenzen die Macht von der Gewalt scharf ab. Für die anderen ist die Gewalt nichts anderes als seine intensivierte Form der Macht. Die Macht wird bald mit dem Recht, bald mit der Willkür assoziiert.”

74 See: M. de Launay: *Macht, Gewalt*. In: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, pp. 3935–3963.

pecially toward the end of the Middle Ages, came to be added to the traditional meaning of *Gewalt*, which originally referred to the entire range of acts connected with the exercise of temporal power: administering, reigning, organizing (the root of the term goes back to the Latin *valere*). It is clear that the associated notions of *potestas* and of *vis* (force) are directly linked to this exercise of power, and because *Gewalt* implies the use of force, the meaning of the term moves easily, by extension, toward the idea of violence, that is, a rebellious, even revolutionary, force exerted against power (*Macht*). *Gewalt* and *Macht* thus share the idea of *potestas*, with *Gewalt* inflecting this idea toward *vis* and *violentia*, while *Macht* tends more toward *potentia*.<sup>75</sup>

It is interesting to note the extent to which the two projects mentioned above, that of Han and that of de Launey, complement each other. De Launay seeks to address the roots of contemporary thinking about *Macht* and *Gewalt* by interpreting and domesticating the concept in French in terms of a translational turn and, drawing on the conceptual roots of Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Weber and Hannah Arendt, trying to pull this common thread to the French philosophy of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Georges Sorel). Thanks to the addition of Daniel Hoffmann-Schwartz (solely in the English version) this thread will continue to Alain Badiou and Jacques Lacan.<sup>76</sup> Han, however, not asking about etymology or genealogy, referred to the whole range of French-speaking philosophers, and domesticated their thoughts under the banner of *Macht*: Georges Bataille, Michel Foucault, Emmanuel Lévinas, Jacques Derrida, and Pierre Bourdieu. His starting point is not so much the so-called *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history, or the history of a concept) but *Problemgeschichte* (the history of a problem), in the form of Niklas Luhmann's "Klassische Theorie der Macht," which utilizes the concept of *pouvoir* as imported via French lexicographical tools.<sup>77</sup> Han attempts to organize the multi-

75 See: *ibid.*, p. 3935; see also the French version: *id.*: *Macht, Gewalt*. In: *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, p. 747: "Lorsque Luther commente Romains 13 ('Que chacun se soumette aux autorités...'), il écrit qu'on ne doit pas résister à l'autorité (*Obrigkeit*) par la force (*Gewalt*), mais uniquement en confessant la vérité' [...]; cette interprétation souligne l'une des connotations – la force rebelle – venues s'adjoindre peu à peu, et surtout vers la fin du Moyen Âge, au sens alors traditionnel de *Gewalt* qui désigne d'abord l'ensemble des actes liés à l'exercice du pouvoir temporel: administrer, régner, organiser (la racine du terme renvoie au latin *valere*). On comprend qu'à cet exercice soient directement liées les notions connexes de *potestas* et de *vis* (force); et du fait que *Gewalt* implique l'usage de la force, le sens du terme glisse, par extension, jusqu'à l'idée de violence, c'est-à-dire l'usage rebelle, voire révolutionnaire, de la force exercée contre le pouvoir (*Macht*). *Gewalt* et *Macht* se partagent ainsi l'idée de *potestas*, *Gewalt* infléchissant cette idée vers la *vis* et la *violentia*, tandis que *Macht* tend plutôt vers la *potentia*."

76 See: D. Hoffmann-Schwartz: *Forcing* (Forçage). In: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, pp. 3953–3961.

77 See: *Grand Dictionnaire de la philosophie*, ed. by M. Blay, Paris: Larousse / CNRS Editions 2003, p. 840.

dimensionality of the concept of *Macht* on the basis of the German language, by simultaneously referencing the Germanized French philosophical texts, thereby building in a very transparent way, the following issues: the logic of power, the power of semantics, the metaphysics of power, the politics of power and finally, the ethics of power.

Given this theoretical confusion a more flexible concept of power should be found, one that would be able to unite the divergent conceptions of power. Thus to formulate is a basic form of power that is generated by shifting internal structural elements of different forms. [...] In this way the idea of power should at least take into itself every concept of power that is based on the fact that you are not sure what it actually is.<sup>78</sup>

The reasons for this heavy terminological confusion in the understanding of power or *pouvoir*, *Macht*, *Kraft*, *Gewalt* and also the different etymological interpretations, are—on the one hand—the obsessive struggle with religion, something that was distinctive for 18<sup>th</sup> century French philosophy (and also natural sciences including physics), and—on the other—the obsession of German Idealism with the concept of *Kultur*, the foundation of 19<sup>th</sup> century concepts of statehood and science, as well as the founding of a university in the spirit of Humboldt's understanding of the institution. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the clash of these “national obsessions” is clearly reflected in the widely-promoted ideological concepts of nation, science, and the role played by each nation in the world. At the root of the present-day interpretation of the concept of power, understood not only in the context of the duo Hobbes and Locke, on the one hand as *potentia* and other *potestas*, is also a more fluid understanding of German concepts such as *Gewalt*, *Macht* and *Kraft*. The separation of powers within democratic statehood is generally expressed through the concept of power. The rule of law in the German language introduces in this place a more adequate but sharp nomenclature, one that is perhaps shocking for the non-German speaking layman, namely, calling powers *Gewalten*. From this point of view, the editors of the *Dictionary of Untranslatables* could formulate the thesis that “power is of considerable importance in modern moral and political philosophy, which stresses freedom more than virtues and the ability to coerce more than authority.”<sup>79</sup>

78 [Transl. by M. H. Kowalewicz], see: B.-Ch. Han, *Was ist Macht?*, p. 7: “Angesichts dieser theoretischen Konfusion soll ein beweglicher Machtbegriff gefunden werden, der die divergierenden Vorstellungen von der Macht in sich zu vereinigen vermöchte. Zu formulieren ist also eine Grundform der Macht, die durch Verschiebung innerer Strukturelemente unterschiedliche Erscheinungsformen generiert. [...] Dadurch soll der Macht zumindest jene Macht genommen werden, die auf dem Umstand beruht, daß man nicht genau weiß, worum es sich eigentlich handelt.”

79 See: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, p. 5238; *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, p. 979.

However, the formation of the “barbarous neologisms” in German mentioned by Dahl has been useful not only for modern physics, but also for understanding power also in political terms. Thus, we can accurately define the contexts in which the concept of power is used in German, which, through the global use of English in different social and human sciences, lost their contours or—as stated by Caillois—began to smack of magic, superstition and irrationality, positions against which the Enlightenment set itself to fight. That knowledge is power, something that was understood both by Leibniz, the secret counselor of Peter the Great, who urged the Tsar to elevate the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and by Humboldt, who also laid the foundations of national statehood on science and the idea of the university. In the Middle Ages we see the establishment of an independent base for the accumulation of the power of knowledge, namely the university, which stood between ecclesiastical and secular authority, but also strengthened the power of both. But it might be worthwhile to put the focus on authority, as Roger Caillois presented the nature and forms of power.

There is no complete power of duress: consent is still the main principle. What is it that allows officer to stop drivers at crossroads by simply raising a white stick? Certainly it is not the physical force of the [acting] agent. Perhaps some obscure reasoning that traffic need be regulated? This is indeed from where it would come if all drivers were philosophers. But how many are there who have considered the issue and, after deliberation, decided to comply with the orders of the officers? No, they instinctively obey the feebler one, but the one who is in authority. Such is the image of all power.<sup>80</sup>

The concepts of power and force, power and energy, *Kraft* and *Energie* open up further possibilities for interpretation, not only from a philosophical point of view. We can imagine how important it is to emphasize power within psychology and psychoanalysis, and how the understanding of power is decisive from the point of view of Augustine and the doctrine of free will, something that can be seen in the debates around the concept of power in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Of particular importance for French-speaking philosophers and sociologists in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Marx’s understanding of the concept. This is seen in Bourdieu’s famous work *Homo academicus*, where special attention was devoted to the

---

80 [Transl. by M. H. Kowalewicz], see: R. Caillois: Le pouvoir charismatique. Adolf Hitler comme idole [Referent power: Adolf Hitler as idol]. In: *id.*: *Oeuvres*, Paris: Gallimard 2008, p. 315: “Il n’y a pas de pouvoir entièrement fondé sur la contrainte: le consentement est toujours le principal. Qu’est-ce qui arrête au carrefour la file des automobiles quand l’agent lève son bâton blanc? Certainement pas la force physique de l’agent. Quelque obscur raisonnement sur la nécessité que la circulation soit réglementée? C’est en effet là qu’on en arriverait si tous les conducteurs étaient des philosophes. Mais combien sont-ils qui ont réfléchi au problème et qui ont décidé après délibération de se conformer aux injonctions des agents? Non, ils obéissent d’instinct au plus faible, mais qui détient l’autorité. Telle est l’image de tout pouvoir.”

“Types of Capital and Forms of Power,”<sup>81</sup> and the reproduction of elites: “The Structure of the Space of the Powers” was divided into two interdependent dimensions: “Time and Power.” How important it is—at this point—to return to Hobbes’s statement *Scientia potentia est!*, because it relates to civil society, not to divinity, as in the writings of Bacon. In this context, key concepts of German idealism and the very idea of university are also important, such as the distinction between people who are “sentenced to success” and those who are “condemned to failure.” Certainly, the Humboldt University was no longer a “recipe for success,” because the social energy had already moved their centers of gravity elsewhere.

Certainly the idea of power is not explored in its entirety within this issue. Rather, within these pages only certain aspects are pointed out and discussed. However, these elements of power may serve as a starting point for further multi-threaded interpretations of this complex construct. Such discussions, including those within the traditions of *Problemgeschichte* and *Begriffsgeschichte*, need not necessarily be based on the inventory of one language, but can be explored through the lens’ of various dominant languages of modern philosophy. Without taking these elements into consideration, we can share in Caillois’ conclusion that:

All power is magic, if we call magic the ability to produce effects without direct contact or agency, causing a perfect and immediate docility of things. But things are not docile; it is necessary to move certain forces, and for these forces to in turn affect the points of application. Also casting sorcerer remains harmless, if it does not add any safer maneuver. But men are more obedient than things: much can affect them by way of words or signs. There is no more a common experience. Magic is the idea that we can control things as if they were beings. Such is the image of all power.<sup>82</sup>

One can add that the word “force” can designate a “mechanical power over things,” and also, metaphorically, “a power of will.” Power as authority, in a democratic state, and it must be exercised not by force, but by the “goal strength.” The resort to pure force characterizes authoritarian regimes or exceptional situations endangering the common good of the nation or state. As suggested by Noam Chomsky, it is also worth recalling the definition of power from the point of view of eco-

81 See: P. Bourdieu, *Homo academicus*, trans. by P. Collier, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 1988.

82 [Transl. by M. H. Kowalewicz], see: R. Caillois: *Le pouvoir charismatique*, p. 315: “Tout pouvoir est une magie réelle, si l’on appelle magie la possibilité de produire des effets sans contact ni agent, en provoquant pour ainsi dire une parfaite et immédiate docilité des choses. Or les choses ne sont pas dociles, il faut des forces pour les mouvoir et, pour ces forces, des points d’application. Aussi l’incantation du sorcier demeure-t-elle inoffensive, s’il n’y ajoute pas quelque manœuvre plus sûre. Mais les hommes sont plus obéissants que les choses: on peut beaucoup obtenir d’eux par des paroles ou par des signes. Il n’est pas d’expérience plus courante. La magie, c’est l’idée qu’on peut commander aux choses comme aux êtres. Telle est image de tout pouvoir.”

nomics, particularly that which was proposed in the late 1960s by John K. Galbraith: "Power in economic life has over time passed from its ancient association with capital and then on, in recent times, to the composite of knowledge and skills which comprises the technostucture ... [that is, the group that] embraces all who bring specialized knowledge, talent or experience to group decision-making [in government and corporation]." <sup>83</sup>

Certainly the tendency to invent simple, but radical conceptual oppositions in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the development of an academic tendency to generate mirror reflections and interdependencies between different concepts at the beginning of the new millennium. Michel Foucault's oppositions, such as that between truth and power, power and knowledge, and truth and ideology, exemplify this trend and led to a various declinations in dialectical schemes. This is what happened, *inter alia*, in the case of the concepts of the idea of power and the power of ideas. And although it fits fully within this newly-fashionable trend, the editors of *Orbis idearum* decided to devote a special issue to the topic of the "power of ideas," the importance of which was spoken about by the likes of Isaah Berlin<sup>84</sup> and Heinrich Heine in his *De l'Allemagne* (written while in exile in France).<sup>85</sup>

We get to know the importance of religion as power not only from the perspective of Heine, but also from within the experiences of our everyday life.<sup>86</sup> With the idea of power in mind, we can draw attention to the reflections about charismatic power by Caillouis, where in a dramatic way he presents the essence of the concept of power:

Sometimes we imagine that there are despots who keep their peoples in compliance with machine guns and force everyone to perform particular tasks under the threat of the gun. This is ultimately a simplification of the mind. In fact, the machine guns never play a big role. They rarely have the opportunity to go into action. Moreover, it is doubtful that they could compel the masses to work. They can only kill many people. Also, it is not so much the machine guns that count, but rather the idea of the machine guns. And even more the idea that they are in the service of the government. I ask nothing more: I only want to suggest that in all power relations, the idea is more important than strength. Without that, moreover, the power would belong to men who manipulate the machine guns, not to the officers who command them [...].<sup>87</sup>

83 Quoted from: N. Chomsky: Knowledge and Power: Intellectuals and the Welfare-Warfare State. In: *Masters of Mankind*, London: Hamish Hamilton 2015, p. 20 [see also in original: J. K. Galbraith: *The New Industrial State*, New York: Houghton Mifflin 1967].

84 See: I. Berlin: *The Proper Study of Mankind. An Anthology of Essays*, London: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1997, p. 192.

85 See: H. Heine: *De l'Allemagne*, 2 vol., Paris: Lévy frères 1855.

86 See: *id.*: *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland*, Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam 1997.

87 [Transl. by M. H. Kowalewicz], see: R. Caillouis: *Le pouvoir charismatique*, pp. 315f.: "On imagine



This is perhaps the reason why our children like to play with machine guns – not only boys, but also girls. This can be seen in computer games, where you can virtually see the effects of *potestas*, *potentia*, *Macht*, *Gewalt*, strength, and violence – all these languages of power. Like never before the virtual and real meet in the form of violence and destruction. This experience has been captured by a single concept, which in light of the conceptual shifts in the last three centuries has never before carried within it such clear signs of rebellious force as today.

In his study *Envisioning Power*, published in 1999, Eric R. Wolf observed that “culture is a concept sinking fast, and power is a concept rising fast.”<sup>88</sup> Two years before, Enrique Krause, one of the leading historians of ideas in Latin America,<sup>89</sup> wrote the history of recent two centuries of Mexico with the characteristic title: *Biography of Power*. Today is it possible to rewrite a new global “biography of power” and not to limit it only to Mexico, as did Enrique Krause. Perhaps it will change only the language we use to describe power. Perhaps it will develop in the way prophesied at the beginning of the millennium by Juan Enriquez on the pages of the *Harvard Review on Latin America*: “Two centuries ago intellectuals read Latin and Greek, a century ago French and/or German. Then English was almost *sine qua non*. Intellectuals must be among the first to understand, debate, create, and transmit a new dominant language. Today the dominant language is Microsoft. Tomorrow’s will be genetics.”<sup>90</sup> Just as today we can write a biography of power in terms of genetics, tomorrow we surrender the politics of new bio-powers.

at the end of 2015,  
a time of global social turbulence on European soil

---

parfois qu’il existe des despotes qui maintiennent leurs peuples en respect avec des mitrailleuses et qui forcent chacun à s’acquitter de sa tâche particulière sous la menace du fusil. Ce n’est finalement qu’une commodité, qu’une simplification de l’esprit. En fait, les mitrailleuses ne jouent jamais si grand rôle. Elles ont rarement l’occasion d’entrer en action. En outre, il est douteux qu’elles puissent obliger une multitude au travail. Elles peuvent seulement tuer beaucoup de monde. Aussi, ce ne sont pas tellement les mitrailleuses qui comptent, c’est plutôt l’idée des mitrailleuses. Et encore plus l’idée qu’elles sont au service du gouvernement. Je ne demande rien de plus: je veux seulement donner à penser qu’en toute relations de pouvoir, l’idée compte plus que la force. Sans cela, d’ailleurs, le pouvoir appartiendrait aux hommes qui manœuvrent les mitrailleuses, non aux officiers qui les commandent [...].”

88 See: E. R. Wolf: *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1999; see also: *id.* / S. Silverman: *Pathways of Power: Building an Anthropology of the Modern World*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2001.

89 See: E. Krause: *Mexico: Biography of Power. A History of Modern Mexico, 1810–1996*, transl. by H. Heifetz, New York, NY: HarperCollins 1997.

90 See: J. Enriquez: The Mexican Intellectual. In: *ReVista. Harvard Review of Latin America*, see online: <http://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/mexican-intellectual> [15.12.15].

- 
- \* See: Th. Hobbes: *Of Power, Worth, Dignity, Honour, and Worthinesse* (Chap. X). In: *Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, London: Printed for Andrew Crooke, at the Green Dragon in St. Pauls Church-yard 1651, p. 67.
  - \*\* See: *id.*: *De Potentia, Dignitate, & Honore* (Capvt X). In: *Leviathan, sive, De materia, forma, & potestate civitatis ecclesiasticae et civilis*, Amsterdam: Joan Blaeu 1668, p. 44.
  - \*\*\* See: J. Locke: *Of Power*. In: *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding*, London: Printed by Eliz. Holt, for Thomas Basset, at the George in Fleet Street, near St. Dunstan's Church 1690 (first edition), p. 130.
  - \*\*\*\* See: R. Caillois: *Le pouvoir charismatique. Adolf Hitler comme idole* (1951). In: *Œuvres*, Paris: Gallimard 2008, p. 315.